

Testimony of Emily Larkin
Thriving Youth Program Coordinator, The Community Fund of Darien

***H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

*February 23 2017 Appropriations Subcommittee on Health Public Hearing
Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services, Regional Action Council Funding*

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Senator Markley, Representative Dillon and members of the Appropriations Subcommittee, my name is Emily Larkin and I am the Thriving Youth Program Coordinator at The Community Fund of Darien. I am here today to strongly oppose the grave cuts to regional action councils that will decimate the current prevention network structure.

In addition to my role as Thriving Youth Program Coordinator at The Community Fund of Darien, I also serve as co-chair of Darien's Local Prevention Council, the Thriving Youth Task Force. In both of these positions, Communities 4 Action is an invaluable partner and resource.

Communities 4 Action was one of the driving forces behind in the formation and ongoing work of Darien's Local Prevention Council. Ingrid Gillespie, the Executive Director of Communities 4 Action, researched and advocated for four years to implement the Search Institute survey in Darien. We began surveying Darien 7-12th graders in 2008 and because of the data collected over the past 8 years; Darien became eligible for a state grant funded by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). In July 2015, The Community Fund received a \$500,000 grant from DMHAS and The Community Fund was able to hire a full time staff member to develop and implement a five-year strategic prevention plan in Darien to combat underage drinking. Writing this grant was not part of Ms. Gillespie's day to day duties. She wrote it on her own time because of her passion to see Darien develop a strong and effective prevention infrastructure.

After receiving this grant, the Darien coalition was tasked with creating a comprehensive Youth Community Needs Assessment and a five-year strategic plan to address Darien's priority risk factors related to underage drinking. The Epidemiological Report that Communities 4 Action compiled was invaluable as we developed our Youth Needs Assessment. Ingrid's guidance was incredibly important as Darien's Thriving Youth Task Force developed our five-year strategic prevention plan. She is a wealth of knowledge about evidence-based programs and her years of experience in Lower Fairfield County, working with Darien specifically, enabled her to highlight what programs would be most effective in our community.

This year, among other strategies, TYTF launched a ground-breaking and provocative social marketing campaign that is reaching every resident in Darien with crucial information about the adolescent brain, social hosting law and the impact of the parent-child relationship as it relates to underage alcohol consumption. Ingrid was a constant resource and sounding board throughout the development of the campaign. She has been at the table at every Thriving Youth Taskforce and subcommittee meeting and is a well-respected contributor to those sessions. She also keeps our Task Force up to date with emerging drug trends and prevention related legislation. These contributions are essential to ensure our Task Force is functioning effectively.

Additionally, Communities 4 Action provides constant opportunities for prevention coordinators in the neighboring towns to network and share resources. Because of the events Ingrid coordinates and hosts, I have been able to build relationships with prevention specialists in similar communities, learn from their experiences and leverage our resources together. She also hosts quarterly legislative breakfasts that have been instrumental in moving effective prevention related legislation forward.

These are just a few examples of the resources Communities 4 Action provides to communities in Lower Fairfield County. Small non-profits need Communities 4 Action to connect them to the research, the partners and the funding to conduct the essential work of prevention. They are an important partner in our work and I urge you to oppose the proposed cuts to the regional action councils.

Thank you,
Emily Larkin

Emily Larkin

Thriving Youth Program Coordinator

The Community Fund of Darien

30 Old Kings Highway South

Darien, CT 06820

Emily.Larkin@communityfunddarien.org

(203) 655-8775